

The Certificate Program in Experiential Jewish Education

The Certificate Program in Experiential Jewish Education (EJE) is delivered by Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future. This nine-month program is designed for Jewish education professionals who have at least three years of professional experience. Participants study key principles of experiential education pertaining to learning processes and group work. With the support of mentors, participants apply these principles to their professional settings. Program participation is associated with high levels of innovation in a wide range of Jewish educational programs and schools.

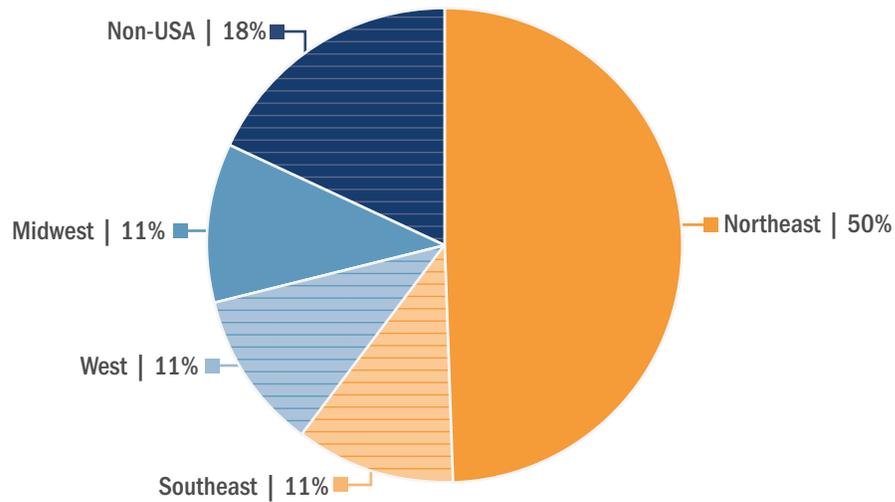
COMPONENTS AND UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAM

The certificate program includes experiential learning in three in-person seminars with expert guest speakers, webinars, and independent study using readings and writing assignments. Each participant is matched with a mentor based on his or her professional background. Mentors work with participants individually and in small groups and they facilitate learning, reflection, application, and access to professional networks and additional learning resources. Each participant designs a project that translates the program content into practice at the participant's work setting. The program introduces participants to prominent theories in relevant fields, including identity formation, memory and knowledge acquisition, and group dynamics. All content is directly linked to educational practices that participants can apply as part of their work. The educational practices are learner centered and include inquiry and exploration, multisensory experiences, and learning linked to student interests. During the in-person seminars, participants engage in activities that model interactive modes of presentation that replace the traditional teacher lecture style with outdoors activities and the use of drama and storytelling. These activities also aim to build relationships among the participants and encourage the formation of a community of practice. The EJE program also provides participants with tools to lead systemic change for integrating experiential Jewish education into educational programs as well as evaluation tools to monitor progress across time.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND WORKFORCE STATISTICS

This section summarizes the characteristics of 84 program participants across the first four program cohorts. The largest age group of EJE participants was 31–40 years (55 percent), followed by individuals who were 30 years old or younger (36 percent). The program served a nearly equal distribution of male (49 percent) and female (51 percent) participants. One half of the participants were from the Northeast at the time of enrollment (Exhibit 1). Nearly one fifth of the participants (18 percent) were from outside the United States, primarily Canada. The geographical locations of participants after program completion were nearly identical.

Exhibit 1. Geographical Location at Enrollment



Participants came from a large variety of Jewish education settings, with the largest groups representing Jewish day schools (27 percent) and Hillel (20 percent). Participants also came from Jewish community centers (JCCs); camps; Birthright BBYO; the National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY); congregational schools; and other organizations, such as the American Jewish World Service, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, jUChicago, and the National Jewish Outreach Program. Prior to program enrollment, 46 percent of the participants served in managerial roles compared with 68 percent after program completion.

LEARNING GOALS AND PROGRAM SATISFACTION

The five most highly ranked learning goals of EJE participants, by declining order of importance, were as follows:

1. Learning new tools that can support the formation of Jewish identity in children, teens, or young adults
2. Learning how to engage learners from diverse backgrounds
3. Acquiring strategies for strengthening relationships between learners and educators and building a sense of community
4. Learning how to deepen learners' exploration of key values, such as tikkun olam (contribute to the advance of justice)
5. Finding creative ways to make text study engaging for learners

Participants rank ordered the following program features as most important to them:

1. Through collaboration with employers, participants learn how to strengthen experiential education within their institutions.
2. The program offers access to frequent consultation with mentors.
3. The program is followed by alumni connections and opportunities for continued professional development.

4. The length of the program is one year or less.
5. The program is tailored to participants who have similar professional backgrounds and job responsibilities.

Most participants (83 percent; based on a survey sample of 67 respondents) rated the program as effective or very effective in developing the skills, knowledge, and traits that participants needed now or in the future. In response to the open-ended survey question, “What professional development opportunities has the Certificate in Experiential Education Program presented to you that were not available before?” respondents noted that professional development on EJE or experiential education in general was not available to them previously, and they did not have access to mentoring prior to the program.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

The Jim Joseph Foundation’s Education Initiative seeks to increase the number of exceptional educators, administrators, and specialized support staff through investments in programs that attract, retain, and develop talent in Jewish education. The initiative is based on the assumption that given the right opportunities and support for career development, educators, administrators, and specialized support staff can deliver the best possible Jewish education for every child, adolescent, and young adult. To ensure their success, the initiative invested in professional development and degree programs at three institutions: Yeshiva University, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, and the Jewish Theological Seminary.

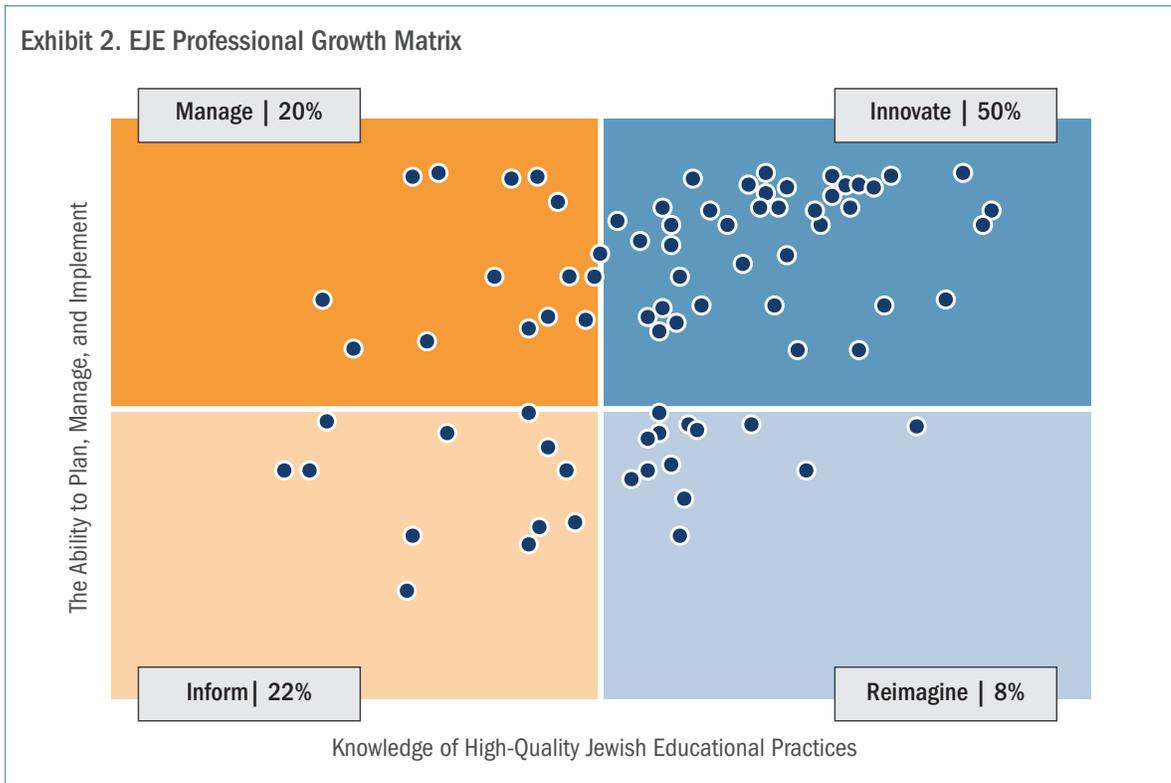
To characterize how the programs supported by the Education Initiative influenced the work of individuals as Jewish educators and educational leaders, AIR researchers developed the Professional Growth Matrix (Exhibit 2), which is divided into four quadrants. Each quadrant embodies a profile of professional growth. The *y*-axis represents the ability to plan, manage, and implement processes and programs in Jewish education settings. The *x*-axis represents knowledge of effective, developmentally appropriate, Jewish educational practices. The currently available data represent the program’s short-term effects. Long-term program effects may be greater as participants assume higher level positions that enable the application of their knowledge and skills.

The effects of the program on each participant depend on many factors, including prior Jewish knowledge and attitudes toward Jewish education, the type of organization and professional role in which the participant works, and autonomy to implement new practices and influence programming at the organizational level.

AIR used quantitative and qualitative data sources (participant surveys, alumni surveys, participant interviews, and employer interviews) to analyze the extent to which the master’s program supported the professional growth of Jewish educators. Professional growth was estimated according to criteria in two categories: (1) ability to plan, manage, and implement programs and (2) knowledge of high-quality Jewish educational practices. The criteria listed under each category receive equal weight. The resulting score for each category is the sum of all criteria and an error component.

These data were coded using a systematic review form based on the following criteria:

Exhibit 2. EJE Professional Growth Matrix



Note. $N = 84$ participants across four cohorts (2011–12 through 2014–15); percentages of participants follow each quadrant label.

Ability to Plan, Manage, and Implement Programs

- **Process Knowledge.** The participant deepened and broadened planning, coordinating, budgeting, supervising, staffing, and other management skills.
- **Relationship Skills.** The participant gained practical skills for managing interactions with colleagues, building a committed staff, and establishing connections within the organization and with individuals in other organizations.
- **Instructional Improvement.** The participant applied the new knowledge and skills from the program to refine or create a program or curriculum in Jewish education.
- **Organizational Improvement.** The participant applied the new knowledge and skills from the program to refine or create processes or policies that promote the capacity and efficiency of the organization.
- **Professional Network.** Through the program, the participant became part of a supportive professional network.
- **Professional Commitment and Self-Esteem.** Through the program, the participant developed stronger confidence in his or her own abilities, a commitment to a career in Jewish education, and motivation to apply the new knowledge and skills to support high-quality Jewish education.

Knowledge of High-Quality Jewish Educational Practices

- **Knowledge of Educational Practices.** The participant acquired knowledge of general educational models, research-based practices, and the alignment of pedagogy with learners' needs and developmental stages.
- **Jewish Learning.** Through the program, the participant acquired knowledge of effective pedagogy of Jewish studies and how to infuse Jewish values into staff learning; program development; and the implementation of programs for children, adolescents, and young adults.
- **Community Relations.** Through the program, the participant acquired knowledge of practices to assess the needs of the local community and align the organization's programs with these needs.
- **Job Description.** The participant gained a greater understanding of the responsibilities involved in one's professional role as well as the roles of others in the organization.
- **Translation of Theory to Practice.** The participant gained the ability to identify models of educational practice that are relevant to one's organization and adapt these models to fit the local context of the organization.
- **Needs Assessment.** The participants gained greater ability to collect and interpret data about the needs of one's organization, program, or classroom and identify areas for improvement.

Each dot on the graph in Exhibit 2 represents one participant. In this graph, each participant is classified into one of four quadrants based on the estimated program effects on the participant. The quadrants are labeled based on their location on the x-axis and y-axis, as follows:

- **Innovate.** High levels of change in relevant educational knowledge and management skills that enable high impact on the school, congregation, or other educational setting.
- **Manage.** A high level of change in management skills that enables one to execute program with high efficiency plus a lower level of change in one's ability to form a new vision for educational programs, practices, or policies.
- **Reimagine.** A high level of relevant educational knowledge that enables one to develop educational materials and become a source of wisdom for others. Participants in this quadrant have a lower level of change in managing or implementing at the organizational level.
- **Inform.** A low level of change in relevant knowledge and management skills. This quadrant typically represents new entrants to the field who work in positions that limit their ability to change current practice or professionals who have jobs that require a different set of knowledge and skills than those learned in the program.

CASE STUDIES REPRESENTING THE FOUR QUADRANTS OF THE PROFESSIONAL GROWTH MATRIX

Innovate

Laura Waldman (pseudonym) is a regional director at NCSY, a national youth group where Jewish teens are empowered to make informed and educated choices that further their commitment to passionate Judaism. Her job responsibilities include recruiting, training, and managing staff members and volunteers and working with lay and rabbinic leaders to create educational programming and organize events. As a result of completing the EJE program, Ms. Waldman's role in NCSY expanded to become the national director of experiential education. In addition to regional programs, she began to develop national programs, such as a leadership development camp for nearly 200 teams from across the United States. This nondegree academic program gave Ms. Waldman the expertise and credibility to bring in new processes and techniques. The EJE program was appealing because of its nondenominational aspect, which Ms. Waldman felt contributed to an expanding professional network. After completing the EJE program, she assessed programming through new lenses and approached program development in a new way. Whereas previously focusing more on the texts and content of programs, Ms. Waldman now invests more intentional efforts in creating environments that provoke teens' spiritual journeys and questions about the personal meaning of Jewish traditions. As a result, programs are more immersive, and staff members have the language to describe practices and their rationale.

Reimagine

Michael Gold (pseudonym) is a senior rabbi in a small Orthodox Jewish congregation that is only one year old. Rabbi Gold oversees and runs services, sermons, educational classes, pastoral counseling, and life-cycle events. Because the new congregation is still developing its processes, the board and staff also are learning how they can assist in the growth and development of the local Jewish community through involvement with local Jewish day schools, local colleges, and community events. Into these discussions, Rabbi Gold brought the knowledge and ideas gained through the EJE program. In addition to the program's content and resources, he was particularly impressed by the process of creating a unified group of Jewish educators who were coming from very different places in terms of professional settings and experiences. Rabbi Gold was inspired by the group's decision to continue relationships among participants to support each other, whether it is specifically related to EJE or other professional challenges. As part of involvement in the strategic planning of the congregation, Rabbi Gold brought in ideas from the EJE program, noting that one especially helpful skill gained from the program is the ability to sort through the many ideas that one can implement and then identify priorities that match the needs of the local community. He uses tools from the EJE program to set short-term and long-term goals and align these goals with the planning of programming schedule. Rabbi Gold has some autonomy to apply instructional practices from the EJE program in the classroom. At the congregation level, he is helping shape the thinking of the board; however, it will take time to translate these ideas into implementation that can affect the congregation and the broader community.

Manage

Rebecca Hirsch (pseudonym) is the executive director in a Hillel of a large university and enrolled in the EJE program out of the belief that Judaism is not learned from textbooks but learned through action. After each EJE seminar, Ms. Hirsch worked to integrate the new ideas and tools into work. The most important tools gained through the EJE program were those that enabled communication with students that would inspire and motivate them and engage them in joint planning. For example, Ms. Hirsch used one EJE tool to create a shared vision of what students wanted their semester to look like to clearly convey and align expectations. Students then created a visual portrait that they refer to throughout the year when students and staff clarify on goals and roles. Ms. Hirsch noted that the planning and communications processes at the Hillel visibly changed because of the EJE program. Instead of simple discussions, her staff leads students through creative, hands-on reflection and collaborative group work that enables shared decision making. Ms. Hirsch has made a difference on campus because the way things were done changed and new processes for relationship building and collaboration were introduced.

Inform

David Wise (pseudonym) is a director of Tefillah programming and Israel education at a Jewish day school. The school head noted that after completing the EJE program, Mr. Wise's planning and instruction took on different methods than those of predecessors. Mr. Wise introduced the school to new techniques for student engagement using project-based learning, technology, art, and facilitation techniques, which changed the way Jewish texts were taught in Jewish studies classes. Instead of focusing on covering a large number of texts, Mr. Wise prioritized uncovering values and exploring them through various prisms with students. For this purpose, he created a learning environment based on theoretical models of multiple intelligences that were learned in the EJE program. These models encourage multisensory experiences that support understanding and knowledge retention. Students reported that they enjoy the open-ended nature of questions and reflections. They also appreciated the new Tefillah program that allows students to express interest and commitment to various forms of prayer. After completing the EJE program, Mr. Wise gained a reputation for being a strong experiential educator and, at the time of data collection, was being sought out to take on an administrative role at a nearby Jewish day school.